

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSING COMMITTEE

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MARCH 10, 2022**

Support

H.B. 5204 - AN ACT CONCERNING A NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND FAIR SHARE PLANS FOR MUNICIPALITIES TO INCREASE AFFORDABLE HOUSING.

S.B. 291 – AN ACT CONCERNING CERTAIN PROTECTIONS FOR GROUP AND FAMILY CHILD CARE HOMES

S.B. No. 294 – AN ACT CONCERNING HOUSING PROTECTIONS FOR VICTIMS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE

S.B. 298 – AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE URBAN HOMEOWNERSHIP LOAN FUND

S.B. 300 – AN ACT CONCERNING A STUDY OF EXCESSIVE RENT INCREASES

Oppose

S.B. 296 – AN ACT ELIMINATING THE REQUIREMENT TO STORE THE PERSONAL PROPERTY OF EVICTED TENANTS

S.B. 297 – AN ACT CONCERNING REIMBURSEMENTS TO LANDLORDS FOR THE DISPOSITION OF TENANT PROPERTY

H.B. 5344 – AN ACT CONCERNING ADVANCE RENTAL PAYMENTS

H.B. 5345 – AN ACT CONCERNING SECURITY DEPOSITS

H.B. 5347 – AN ACT CONCERNING THE REVIEW OF CRIMINAL HISTORIES FOR PROSPECTIVE TENANTS

Neither Support Nor Oppose

H.B. 5346 – AN ACT ESTABLISHING A PILOT PROGRAM TO FUND SOCIAL WORKERS IN EMERGENCY SHELTERS

Senator Lopes, Representative Williams, Senator Cicarella, Representative Polletta, and members of the committee, my name is Kiley Gosselin. I am executive director at the Partnership for Strong Communities – a statewide nonprofit policy and advocacy organization

dedicated to ending homelessness, expanding the creation of affordable housing, and building strong communities in Connecticut. Thank for you the opportunity to submit testimony today on the following bills.

Support H.B. 5204 - AN ACT CONCERNING A NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND FAIR SHARE PLANS FOR MUNICIPALITIES TO INCREASE AFFORDABLE HOUSING.

Partnership for Strong Communities supports H.B. 5204. Connecticut needs more homes for more people in all our towns. Every Connecticut resident needs the security and stability that an affordable home offers. Our towns can be great places to live while also becoming more affordable. A diversity of housing choices brings economic vibrancy and mobility to our towns, regions, and state.

Every Connecticut community has an obligation to contribute to meeting the housing needs of our state, including permitting its fair share of housing for both low- and moderate-income households.

Fair Share Housing involves taking a hard look at our state's true need for affordable housing and then, allocating the need to planning regions and municipalities resulting in affordable housing planning and zoning goals for each municipality. This is a model the State of Connecticut should consider.

We know that Connecticut's out of reach housing costs are a driver of its economic stagnation. 117,000 Connecticut renter households pay more than 50% of their income for housing; 108,000 renter households spend between 30% - 50% of income on housing costs. The legacy of intentional segregating policies, like redlining, which is reinforced by modern-day large lot, single family zoning, is a prime contributor to high housing costs and has made Connecticut one of the most segregated states in the nation.

Housing options, affordable at a range of incomes, are critical to attracting businesses to Connecticut, allowing CT families to free up income for other critical needs, like education, generating a pathway to middle-income stability. A fair share system in Connecticut communities could use thoughtful planning and zoning to unleash the market's ability to generate mixed income housing with affordable units and play a foundational role in launching a new wave of economic growth for the state while guiding their own destinies.

Having a greater diversity of housing choices, including affordable housing, will create more vibrant, economically and environmentally sound, and diverse communities. A Fair Share system will help us achieve those goals. We urge your support of this bill.

Support S.B. 291 – AN ACT CONCERNING CERTAIN PROTECTIONS FOR GROUP AND FAMILY CHILD CARE HOMES

Connecticut has a strong policy in favor of encouraging and expanding the availability of child day care for working parents by preventing towns from discriminating against family daycare in residential areas. This allows parents to find licensed childcare near their homes and offers



employment opportunities to daycare providers. This bill prohibits landlords from preventing tenants from providing licensed family daycare in their rental homes. Prohibiting family childcare homes in rentals would disproportionately affects women, immigrants, and families with small children both as care providers and users. State licensing and inspection will continue to assure that such units are appropriate in size and condition for the number of children authorized. We urge your support for the bill.

Support S.B. No. 294 – AN ACT CONCERNING HOUSING PROTECTIONS FOR VICTIMS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE

We support this bill which will prohibit a landlord from taking certain adverse actions against a tenant because the tenant is a victim of domestic violence. Victims of domestic violence face many barriers to obtaining stable housing, including financial abuse by their abuser, destroyed credit, and possible eviction history because of the actions of the abuser. The consequences of eviction for victims are severe. Housing instability makes it more likely for them to remain with or return to an abuser. The state should support policies like this one to keep victims safely housed especially because skyrocketing rents make affordable, stable, and safe homes so difficult to obtain.

Support S.B. 298 – AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE URBAN HOMEOWNERSHIP LOAN FUND

We support this bill which would create an Urban Homeownership Loan fund for use in certain lower income neighborhoods. Critically, this fund would provide a source for gap appraisal funding to facilitate the rehabilitation of existing homes in need for repair for use as owner-occupied homes. In many of the soft housing markets found in some of Connecticut's cities, the combined costs of purchasing and rehabilitating an older residential property may be greater than the resulting appraised value of the property, making financing nearly impossible to find. This can lead to a cycle of deteriorating housing stock and community disinvestment.

Support S.B. 300 – AN ACT CONCERNING A STUDY OF EXCESSIVE RENT INCREASES

We support this bill which directs the Department of Housing to study excessive rent complaints to fair rent commissions and make recommendations for changes to Connecticut law to protect residents in the state from excessive rent increases. Connecticut's rents have soared over the past two years, increasing by 15% in that period. Half of renters pay more than 30% of their income on housing. Incredibly, more than 117,000 households pay more than 50% of their income towards housing costs, leaving families with little to spend on necessities like food, healthcare, and transportation. Tenants are unlikely to find relief from these unsustainable rents soon. A 2021 study commissioned by Connecticut's Department of Housing found an 86,000 unit gap in affordable housing needed for very low-income



households. We recognize that the department must be given any additional resources it may need to successfully complete a study.

Oppose S.B. 296 – AN ACT ELIMINATING THE REQUIREMENT TO STORE THE PERSONAL PROPERTY OF EVICTED TENANTS

We oppose this bill. It is essential that the municipality, a neutral party, give the tenant the possibility of recovering their personal possessions after an eviction, and conduct any resale proceedings. We urge the committee to take no action on this bill.

Oppose S.B. 297 – AN ACT CONCERNING REIMBURSEMENTS TO LANDLORDS FOR THE DISPOSITION OF TENANT PROPERTY

We oppose this bill. It is unnecessary, and the eviction court is not the appropriate place to deal with financial orders. We urge the committee to take no action on this bill

Oppose H.B. 5344 – AN ACT CONCERNING ADVANCE RENTAL PAYMENTS and H.B. 5345 – AN ACT CONCERNING SECURITY DEPOSITS

Both bills remove the current two-months rent maximum on security deposits leaving no maximum. This will result in grossly excessive security deposit requirements beyond the means of low- and moderate-income tenants. For example, if a landlord requires 3 months security deposit on an apartment renting for \$1,500/month, a prospective tenant will need to come up with \$6,000 to move in (3 months security plus first month's rent). Removing a maximum security deposit also invites discrimination. The landlord can set an unreasonably high security deposit and choose to waive it for applicants they prefer, allowing them to hide discrimination behind the supposedly neutral high security deposit requirement.

Oppose H.B. 5347 – AN ACT CONCERNING THE REVIEW OF CRIMINAL HISTORIES FOR PROSPECTIVE TENANTS

We strongly oppose this bill which would remove protections provided to prospective tenants with erased criminal history in Clean Slate legislation passed in 2021. Expunging criminal records and making refusal to rent or sell to individuals with expunged records is a racial and national origin justice issue. Because of well-documented racial and ethnic disparities in all phases of the criminal justice system, permitting landlords to use erased criminal records to screen tenants may result in race and national origin discrimination and perpetuate racial segregation. It also prevents people recently released from incarceration from accessing decent, safe, affordable housing, even though stable housing is the leading factor in determining whether someone can successfully re-integrate into society.



Neither Support nor Oppose H.B. 5346 – AN ACT ESTABLISHING A PILOT PROGRAM TO FUND SOCIAL WORKERS IN EMERGENCY SHELTERS.

We support efforts to bolster services in emergency shelters (including social workers) and all of the other organizations funded by the state that provide services, support vulnerable families in housing and prevent households from becoming homeless. This underscores the need to adequately fund frontline workers at the state's supportive services, homeless crisis response and housing services organizations. Rather than the creation of a separate pilot program using existing funds, however, we respectfully redirect the committee to the request made by the Reaching Home campaign and its partners to adequately fund existing nonprofit service contracts made by the state, specifically through DMHAS and DOH.

Reaching Home, the state campaign to end homelessness is supporting the Connecticut Nonprofit Alliance's request of an additional 8% increase in state contracts for nonprofit service providers. This includes those state contracts under DMHAS and DOH that provide services to prevent and end homelessness as well as homeless crisis response services (including many social workers). In addition to that, Reaching Home notes that it would take an additional \$13.34 million in fiscal year 2023 to provide homeless and housing service organizations funding for adequate wages, benefits, and professional development for their frontline workers. Without additional funding it is difficult to attract and retain employees, pay their employees a living wage, maintain reasonable caseload sizes, and support staff training.

Many providers are yet to see the impact of the four percent increases enacted in the fiscal year 2022 budget. There has been no cost-of-living adjustment on DOH and DMHAS state contracts for many years, leaving providers squeezed to provide the same level of service to clients. Appropriate funding of these contracts assists households in exiting homelessness, but also in providing critical wrap-around services to ensure that permanently housed households remain so.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

